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AGRICULTURE AND NATIONAL DEFENSE

THREE OVER AND ONE TO GO: On Wednesday and Thursday USDA and farm representatives of the Northeastern States held their "Food for Freedom" conference in New York. Due to mushrooming employment in this industrial area, farmers there face situation different from that of farm groups attending Salt Lake and Chicago meetings. New England farmers already are feeling labor pinch. Best farm hands have shifted to higher-paying industrial jobs. Drought cut feed supplies, and higher feed costs raising farm production costs. Especially for milk.

STATE DEFENSE BOARD CHAIRMAN DWIGHT MINOR OF CONNECTICUT, for example, said more than 50,000 new workers have found jobs in Conn. industries in past year, boosting population about 150,000. Another 50,000 expected to be added this year, adding another 150,000 or boosting the State's total population from about 1,700,000 to 2,000,000. This has placed a strain on farmers to provide such foods as milk, eggs, and fresh vegetables.

GOALS FOR NORTHEASTERN STATES will be about enough to take care of this increase in domestic consumption. Thus, drain from surplus areas will be averted so that these products can be processed into food for the democracies. State Chairmen in reporting on State goals were unanimously of the opinion that farmers in their States could meet the new demands. They felt, however, that in the face of a growing shortage in farm labor, and in advancing costs of production, efforts should be continued to keep farm prices at an equitable level.

SECRETARY WICKARD TOOK COGNIZANCE of the problems faced by northeastern farmers but warned that the time was past when they may expect "to do business as usual." He said farmers could expect to pay more for their hired help, do without some needed new equipment, but "I rely upon your 'Yankee' ingenuity in getting the job done."

METAL SCARCITY TIGHTENING DOWN: Direct and indirect defense demands for metals outstripping supplies. OADR reports that it is apparent that there won't be enough to go around so far as civilian requirements are concerned. Can expect in less than 6 months' actual shortages of such items as fencing, galvanized sheets, nails, iron pipe, etc. (Note: Rural Electrification Administration, in direct contact with its farmer cooperatives, is organizing a "share your equipment plan." Some farmer may have a motor to pull a feed grinder, and another may not. This is an effort to get these two farmers together.)

ONE FAVORABLE NOTE IN THE METALS SITUATION is the speed with which SPAB is now handling priorities. Trend is toward priorities being handled on a blanket basis instead of an individual item basis. Cuts about 95 percent of the paper work and speeds up operations greatly. Under the old plan, a manufacturer would have to get steel priority certificates to manufacture parts for farm machinery. Under new system repairs for all farm machinery and equipment are blanketed under one general priority. Other general blanket priority orders affecting agriculture are the previously mentioned orders for ratings given to processing equipment replacement parts, and for new machinery. A warehouse plan, which will cover such items as iron pipe, nails (certain types of general hardware), also has been worked out. There is a health plan for animal biologicals (hog cholera serum and virus blackleg serum, etc.). In the mill is a plan for a blanket priority on fungicides, insecticides, disinfectants, etc. Thus, manufacturers can obtain priorities to manufacture their whole product or line of products instead of making applications item by item.

NEED FOR FARM LABOR, as brought out at the New York meeting, continues one of the pressing farm problems in several sections and no doubt will become more acute next spring when peak needs will come both on the farm and in the factory. The Office of Agricultural Defense Relations has paid particular attention to the farm labor problem during the past year and plans to assist farmers in every way possible during the coming months. Out of the experience of the last year, OADR has reached the following general conclusions:

1. THE SKILLED AND SEMI-SKILLED AGRICULTURAL WORKERS in areas close to industrial plants are being drawn to higher-pay jobs in industry. Farmers can't outbid industry for this type of worker. Industry can always keep the ante a little higher.
2. FARMERS IN SOME AREAS HAVE FELT UNABLE TO GRANT farm wage increases, and have experienced shortages when a higher farm wage rate could have done the job. Better farm prices should help this situation.
3. IN AREAS WHERE SHORTAGES WERE MOST ACUTE, communities which planned at the local level -- seeking assistance of LOCAL labor agencies -- had a minimum of trouble.

While the Department can plan and work with the various government agencies at the national level, effectual work on specific problems can be worked out ONLY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. Furthermore, plans now are not too soon for next year.

GOOD EXAMPLE: Oregon farmers found this year that they were about to lose their strawberries because they didn't have the labor to pick the crop. Through the assistance of the Farm Security Administration and the U. S. Employment Service, migrant camps were established and surplus labor from California was brought in for the harvest. The farmers arranged with filling stations along the route to furnish gas and oil to the workers. There was an employment office at each of the camps established. There was no mad scramble to outbid each other. A fair wage scale was set. The workers were assured a reasonable length of employment. They stayed on for the harvest of other crops.

Next year growers of other products are expected to join with the strawberry growers in sharing the expense of moving the workers into the migrant camps. Here established LOCAL governmental agencies got the job done where labor contractors (padrones) couldn't. (Beware of the chiseling labor padrone this coming year. In the past he has been satisfied to take his cut from the laborers. He was supplying labor on a buyers' market. Now, on a sellers' market he can racketeer both ways. There is nothing to keep him from "selling" services of his labor group to a farmer, and move on to another farm before the job is completed.)

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